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Historical Sketch of Country Line Church

Caswell County, North Carolina

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HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE COUNTRY LINE BAPTIST CHURCH NEAR YANCEYVILLE, CASWELL COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

(This brief monograph was compiled by W. J. Berry on request of Caswell County Historical Association, Inc.)

From about 1750 to 1785 was called The Great Awakening, both in England and America. During those years in the American Colonies, especially just prior to and during the Revolutionary War, there was much unrest and new settlers moving southward. The records and published histories show that many new congregations or churches were begun in this part of North Carolina.

In English and early American History all religious societies which refused to conform to the laws of the established Church of England, were called Dissenters or Nonconformists. These included the early Anabaptists Independents, Quakers, Baptists, Mennonites, etc. As dissenters, they were regarded as heretical sects, and therefore not allowed privileges common to members of the state-church. Baptists especially, were often persecuted because of their doctrine and practice. Their insistence on their freedom in Christ to worship God independent of ecclesiastical establishments, was a constant irritant to the state church.

Most of these dissenting bodies were necessarily only loosely related to each other, although having fundamental beliefs in common, were not uniform in their beliefs and

practice. For the above reasons it is proper that we notice some of the ministers directly connected with the gathering of those early churches, among which Country Line is only one.

Some of those early ministers who freely preached the gospel, and suffered hardships and persecution for their faithfulness, were: Jeremiah Moore, James Reed, Elijah and Lewis Craig, John Waller, James Ireland, John Leland, John Weatherford, and others. From the ministerial labors of these early ministers we have glowing accounts of God's mercy and sovereign grace in His wonderful works to the children of men.

Samuel Harriss and his co-laborers were instrumental in gathering and helping to establish several congregations in this area. Among these was the one near Yanceyville, North Carolina. The meetings were first begun in homes. Perhaps the first meeting house built for Country Line Church was on the north bank of Country Line Creek, southwest of Yanceyville. This was about one acre deeded by Sarah Tate in 1801 to the church served by Barzillai Graves, known as North Country Line Church¹ (There was at that time a South Country Line Church). There remains on this property the old cemetery.

The members of the first Country Line Church were made up of members in Caswell County and Pittsylvania County, Virginia. According to John Asplund it was organized in 1772². John Oakes and Thomas Mullen (or Mullins) were assistants to Samuel Harriss at Country Line Church in 1772³.

Country Line Church seated messengers in the first session of the Roanoke Association (Va.), in 1788, reported 160 members in 1790, Thomas Mullins (or Mullen) pastor and Joseph Bush itinerant minister⁴.

In 1794 a number of churches situated in North Carolina requested to be dismissed from the Roanoke Association to form the Flat River Association of North Carolina. Country Line Church was one of these churches. In 1806 Flat River divided by a line running north and south, and the churches west of this line formed the Country Line Baptist Association, named by the Country Line Creek. The churches from these two Associations originated from the Separate Baptists, and some of the oldest of them were gathered by Samuel Harriss, James Reed, Thomas Mullins and Dutton Lane⁵.

The second, and present location of Country Line Church is on old Highway 62 five miles south of Yanceyville. The present highway took part of the three acres, deeded to the church in 1869 by J. L. Graves⁶.

In about the year 1827 the churches of the Country Line Association declared against the movement then agitating the Baptist churches over missions, seminaries, Sunday Schools, salaried ministry, etc. For traveling convenience, in 1906 the Country Line Association was divided into the Upper and Lower Country Line Associations, Country Line Creek was used as the dividing line, and Country Line Church represented by messengers in the Upper Country Line Association.

At different times Country Line Church chose not to send messengers to the Association, sometimes represented by Letter only. Because of general disturbance, causing divisions in some churches and Associations, Country Line Church chose not to represent to the Association and to stand as an independent body, agreed to by the Association conference of 1956. The church made its position clear that she held the sister churches in fellowship, desiring the love and fellowship of the household of faith and God's humble poor everywhere, who love the truth as it is in Jesus, and who seek that better country; that she desires the continued fellowship of the brethren and to be found of the Lord in peace at His coming.

Of the original four congregations,—three in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, and one in Caswell County, North Carolina under Samuel Harriss, only two remain, County Line (Va.) is Missionary. and Country Line (Caswell County, N. C.) remains Primitive Baptist.⁷

From the published records of preaching circuits in this area, namely, Pittsylvania County, Virginia, Guilford, Orange, Caswell and Person Counties in North Carolina, the church at Country Line up to 1800 was visited by such ministers as Shubal Stearns and his co-laborers, James Reed, Elisha Craig, John Waller, James Ireland, Joseph and William Murphy, and others.

Others who preached here from 1800, were:
John Stadler, James Osborne, P. D. Gold, L. H. Hardy,
A. N. Hall, and others.

Those who served as pastor or assistant were:
Samuel Harriss, John Oakes, Thomas Mullen (or Mullins)
Joseph Bush, Barzillai Graves, L. I. Bodenheimer, James
S. Dameron, James A. Burch, F. L. Oakley, Y. I. Chandler,
B. B. McKinney, W. C. King, from 1944 to the present
(1975), W. J. Berry Sr.

1. Deed Book M, p 146, Register of Deeds for Caswell County, North Carolina.
2. Asplund, op. cit. p 36.
3. Virginia Material by Morgan Edwards, Cozer Ms. p 5.
4. The Forgotten Story of Falls Creek Church, by John S. Moore. The Virginia Baptist Register, No. 10, 1971, p 447.
5. Gen. Hist. of the Baptists by Benedict, Vol. II, p 105, 106. See also Hist. of Baptists in Virginia by Robert Semple, Beale Ed., p 309.
6. Deed Book, LL, p 244, Reg. of Deeds Office for Caswell County, Yanceyville, North Carolina.
7. See The Almost Forgotten Story of Falls Creek Church by John S. Moore, Virginia Baptist Register, No. 10, 1971.

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